

## How serious are birth defects?

***Birth defects are a serious problem.*** One in 33 babies is born with a birth defect. Many people believe that birth defects only happen to other people. Birth defects can and do happen in any family. About 120,000 babies born in the United States each year have birth defects.

## What is the good news?

***The good news is that new ways of preventing and treating birth defects are being found.***

Genes that may cause birth defects are being found every day, providing hope for new treatments and cures. Genetic counseling can provide parents with information about their risks based on family history, age, ethnic or racial background, and other factors.

Better health care for mothers with problems like diabetes or seizures can improve their chances of having healthy babies. Immunization prevents infections like German measles (rubella) that can harm unborn babies.

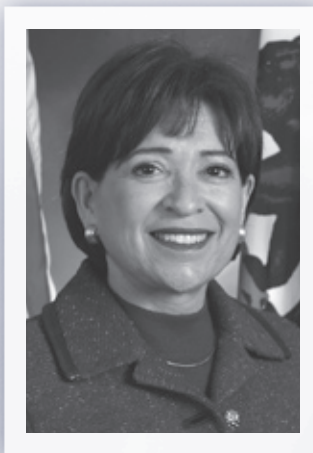
## Did you know?

***All women who could get pregnant should get 400 micrograms (sometimes written as 400 mcg or 0.4 mg) of folic acid every day.*** Folic acid is a B-vitamin that can reduce the risk of birth defects of the brain and spine.

Today, babies born with birth defects can live longer and healthier lives. Special care after birth and newborn screening tests can help some of these babies.

Many states keep track of how often and where birth defects occur. Your state may be able to tell you about birth defects and services that may help you or someone you know.

For more information, please contact **Baby Call** at **(800) BABY-999**, or get in touch with your physician.



*Compliments of*  
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**Mary Salas**

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# Preventing Birth Defects







California State Assembly  
**Mary Salas**  
 ASSEMBLYMEMBER, 79TH DISTRICT

Dear Friend:

*While the cause of about two-thirds of birth defects remains unknown, clearly there are steps that a woman can take to increase her chance of having a healthy baby. Many birth defects happen very early in pregnancy, often before a woman even knows she is pregnant.*

Having regular check-ups, living a healthy lifestyle and having a better understanding of your environment and medications will go a long way toward avoiding birth defects. Although one in 33 babies in the United States has a birth defect, there are many different types of birth defects and each individual defect is rare. The good news is that every year new ways of detecting, preventing and treating birth defects are being found.

The following brochure provides some basic information on birth defects, its prevention and other resources available for you to learn more about this issue.

*If you have any questions or concerns regarding any state issue, including prevention and detection of birth defects, please contact the District Office at (619) 409-7979.*

It is a pleasure to serve you.

Sincerely,

MARY SALAS  
 Assemblymember, 79th District

## What are birth defects?

**Birth defects are abnormal conditions that happen before or at the time of birth.** Some are mild—like an extra finger or toe. Some are very serious—like a heart defect. They can cause physical, mental, or medical problems. Some, like Down Syndrome or Sickle Cell Anemia, are caused by genetic factors. Others are caused by certain drugs, medicines, or chemicals. The causes of most birth defects are still a mystery. Researchers are working hard to learn the causes of birth defects so we can find ways to prevent them.

## What steps can women take for healthier babies?

**Not all birth defects can be prevented, but a woman can increase her own chance of having a healthy baby.** Many birth defects happen very early in pregnancy, sometimes before a woman even knows she is pregnant. Remember that about half of all pregnancies are unplanned. **Consequently, every woman should:**

- **Take a multivitamin that has 400 micrograms of folic acid in it every day.**
- Have regular medical check-ups.
- Talk to her health care provider about any medical problems and use of medicine (*both over-the-counter and prescription*). Ask about avoiding any substances at work or at home that might be harmful to a developing baby.
- Keep vaccinations (*shots*) up to date.
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet.
- Avoid eating raw or undercooked meat.
- Avoid alcohol, tobacco and street drugs.

**Every pregnant woman should know:**

- Keep up the healthy habits listed above.
- Get early prenatal care and keep every appointment.

## Did you know?

- **Birth defects are the leading cause of death in children less than 1 year of age—causing one in every five deaths.**
- **18 babies die every day in the United States as the result of birth defects.**
- **Defects of the heart and limbs are the most common birth defects.**
- **Millions of dollars are spent every year for the care and treatment of children with birth defects.**

## Want to know more?

**Ask your health care provider or local health department how to plan for a healthy baby.**

Call the **March of Dimes Resource Center** at **1-888-663-4637** (toll-free), or visit: [www.modimes.org](http://www.modimes.org)

Call the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (CDC) at **1-888-232-5929** (toll-free) or **1-404-498-3800** or visit: [www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/folicacid](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/folicacid)

Call the **Organization of Teratology Information Services** (OTIS) at **1-866-626-6847** (toll-free), for a referral to the nearest services or visit [www.otispregnancy.org](http://www.otispregnancy.org) for information about exposures during pregnancy.

Call the **Birth Defects Registry** or **Genetics Program** at your state health department.

**The National Birth Defects Prevention Network** (NBDPN) is a national network of individuals working at local, state, and federal levels in birth defects surveillance, research, and prevention. [www.nbdpn.org/NBDPN](http://www.nbdpn.org/NBDPN)

